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Making Performance Assessments a Part of Accountability

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Abstract: The purpose of this commentary is to describe recent efforts in Virginia to develop and use performance assessments, including the challenges that emerged during this process and key considerations for states that integrate performance assessment into their systems. Performance assessments can play an important role in preparing students for success and college and career, as described in Virginia's Profile of a Virginia Graduate.

Keywords: performance assessment; education policy; accountability, Virginia

Creando evaluaciones de rendimiento que son parte de la responsabilidad

Resumen: El propósito de este comentario es para describir los esfuerzos recientes en Virginia para desarrollar y utilizar evaluaciones de desempeño, incluyendo los desafíos que surgieron durante este proceso y consideraciones clave para los estados que integran la evaluación del desempeño en sus sistemas. Las evaluaciones de rendimiento pueden tener un papel importante en la preparación de los estudiantes para el éxito en la universidad y la carrera, como se describe en el Perfil de Virginia, una graduada de Virginia.

Palabras clave: evaluación del desempeño; política educativa; responsabilidad; Virginia

Criando avaliações de desempenho que fazem parte da responsabilidade

Resumo: O objetivo deste comentário é descrever os esforços recentes na Virgínia para desenvolver e usar avaliações de desempenho, incluindo os desafios que surgiram durante esse processo e considerações importantes para os estados que integram a avaliação de desempenho em seus sistemas. As avaliações de desempenho podem desempenhar um papel importante na preparação dos alunos para o sucesso na faculdade e carreira, conforme descrito no Virginia Profile, um graduado da Virgínia.

Palavras-chave: avaliação de desempenho; política educacional; responsabilidade; Virgínia

Making Performance Assessments a Part of Accountability

Estimates project that by 2021 there will be over 500,000 new jobs in Virginia. Many of these jobs will be in the areas of science, technology, or the health care fields. Some of the jobs will need four year degrees, while many of these “middle level” jobs will require certification or only two year degrees. Virginia has made a commitment to make sure the students who graduate from our high schools have the skills and are prepared to compete for these jobs.

Virginia’s Profile of a Virginia Graduate will describe the skills and dispositions students should attain during their K-12 school years. Action verbs are used to describe these skills and dispositions. The use of performance tasks is a method of assessment aligned with instruction that requires students to demonstrate, explore, attain, understand, align, and communicate. Students need to have opportunities to demonstrate what they know and use what they know to investigate and problem solve. Students cannot be provided these learning opportunities through multiple choice assessments alone.

Many would categorize No Child Left Behind as a one-size-fits-all, watered-down, minimal standards approach that assessed with multiple choice assessments that allow for little or no creative teaching. ESEA has been in place and relatively unchanged for 18 years. ESSA has the potential to bring about changes and many of those changes can be accomplished with the use of performance tasks and assessments. Instruction can be individualized and scaffold to meet the learning styles and needs of students whether gifted and talented or students with learning disabilities or special needs. Performance tasks and assessments provide opportunities for collaborative and engaging learning, open-ended questions, and demonstrations of problem solving.

Performance Assessment in Virginia

While reading Stosich et al.’s (2018) *How Do States Integrate Performance Assessments into Their Systems of Assessment?* I reflected on the work Virginia did to begin the development of performance assessments. In 2014, the General Assembly passed legislation that replaced five state assessments with local assessments. The State Board of Education (BOE) created guidelines to support and guide this transition. While not mandating the use of performance assessments, the BOE encouraged their use. In the spring of 2014, Governor McAuliffe built on the work of the General Assembly by creating a Standards of Learning Innovation Committee. This committee was charged with making recommendations to the Board of Education and the General Assembly on ways to reform Standards of Learning, measures of student growth, and to innovate teaching.

For the first two years, FY 2015 and FY 2016, the Virginia Department of Education was able to provide modest grants to each of Superintendent’s Regions. The purpose of these grants was twofold: 1) to provide fiscal resources to support professional development, and 2) to encourage collaboration and sharing among school divisions. Virginia’s 134 school divisions, which are similar

to school districts in other states, were in very different places with performance assessment work and had varied resources.

Challenges in Integrating Performance Assessment in Local Systems of Assessment

A few divisions had started work on performance assessments and were actually implementing them as part of the curriculum, but most were just beginning. As we worked with the regions, several challenges divisions were facing came to light.

One issue was the limited capacity of teacher training and knowledge. Many of Virginia's teachers had little knowledge of performance assessments. A lot of teachers had attended public school in the era of No Child Left Behind and had actually experienced Standards of Learning assessments. They had been taught with multiple choice assessments being the model and had been trained to teach in the same way. These teachers were used to a multiple choice test-based accountability system and had never experienced performance assessments. Helping teachers learn how to use portfolios, projects or performance tasks was the first step for many divisions.

A second challenge was helping teachers to "unpack" the Standards of Learning. To create quality performance assessments, teachers have to understand the standards. They were about to create assessments that were asking students to demonstrate not only what they know, but what they understand and can do. We were going to ask students to apply what they know. To do this, there has to be a deep understanding of the curriculum and standards. We were going to ask questions that had more than one correct answer. Once the quality performance assessments were created, the next challenge was scoring them. Many teachers had not created or used rubrics. Scoring student work with a rubric is much more challenging than grading a multiple choice assessment.

With the implementation of performance tasks, the role of teachers changed. Most performance tasks require students to be more inquisitive, investigative, creative, and to work in teams. In classrooms where this type of learning is taking place, teachers become more of a moderator of learning rather than being the person imparting the knowledge.

Resources, fiscal, infrastructure, and curriculum, are concerns in the development of performance tasks. While the work of developing and writing performance tasks does not require many fiscal resources, teacher time and professional development to build the capacity of teachers to complete that work can become costly.

Staff infrastructure is a challenge for many divisions. Some divisions do not have administrative and instructional staff who can lead the work of developing performance tasks, so developing a knowledgeable training team can be difficult. The other staffing challenge for divisions is retaining staff, including superintendents and principals. Leadership changes often mean a change in priorities and focus for divisions and schools.

There are great challenges facing states in the implementation of performance tasks as part of accountability. There will have to be some consistency in the performance task that gets implemented. Will states use common assessments and common use rubrics? How will the integrity of the assessment be protected? Who will score the performance assessments and how will the state guarantee consistency in scoring? All of this can happen. Advanced Placement consistently scores thousands of open-ended and essay assessments each year. It will be a matter of developing a similar type system at the state level.

In 2016, the Virginia General Assembly adopted legislation that required the Board of Education to develop the *Profile of a Virginia Graduate*, the skills, knowledge, competencies and experiences students should attain in school that will make them life ready. When developing this

profile, the 5 c's of collaboration, communication, creativity, critical thinking, and citizenship should be incorporated. These skills will be implemented in revised graduation requirements and Virginia's *Standards of Accreditation*.

The need for the 5c's and other dispositions, such as work place skills, application of knowledge, and an understanding of personal and civic responsibility, were identified as essential by stakeholders such colleges, universities, and employers.

Performance assessments can play an important role in preparing students as defined by the *Profile of a Virginia Graduate*. Many of these skills and dispositions can and will be demonstrated by students in performance tasks. Performance assessments lend themselves to be more interdisciplinary, which creates opportunities for more authentic tasks. Performance tasks scored by rubrics also provide a better opportunity to award students credits based on the mastery of standards versus seat time.

Key Considerations for the Use of Performance Assessment

As states continue their work on integrating performance assessments, there are two considerations that people should keep in mind. The first is time. The process of educating and training teachers, creating high quality, rigorous performance assessments, and learning to score in a reliable and consistent manner will take time. States who are leading this work have taken between seven and 12 years to be in a place to have valid and reliable performance tasks that can be used as part of their accountability system. There are no short cuts in getting to this point.

The second consideration is "balance." In the late 1990s and the passage of No Child Left Behind, the country's education system let the pendulum swing in one direction – multiple choice assessments as the only measure of accountability. It took 18 years to get reauthorization of ESSA, which gives states more control of their state accountability systems. While performance tasks are a tremendous method of assessing student achievement, every skill and standard cannot be measured by performance tasks. Proceed with caution and balance.

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